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Response Paper 3, “*Death of a Salesman*”

The *Death of a Salesman* is a play that struggles between reality and perceived reality. Albert Einstein once said, “Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one,” and Willy, the *Death of a Salesman’s* main character, faces an internal battle of what he wants his life to be and what it actually is. Willy’s hallucinations, or dreams as they are commonly referred to as in the play, allow him to escape situations in the present that are difficult for him and form an alternate ending to that pressing issue so that he is more favorable at the end of it. Willy’s dreams, or escapes from reality, are just one of the major issues that the *Death of a Salesman* deals with. Pride and the need for acceptance and personal validation are major themes that are addressed in *Death of a Salesman*.

Pride is a major theme in *Death of a Salesman.* Throughout the play we can see that Willy is struggling to accept the decline in his career’s financial earnings. We first see this occur when Willy returns from work physically and mentally tired and complains to his wife, Linda that he continues to fall into dreams even while doing activities like driving. Towards the end of Act one it is revealed by Linda that Willy’s hallucinations were a direct result from his having lost his salary and him only working for a commission. Willy is a proud man and cannot fathom the thought of not being the provider he once was so he supplemented his salary with fifty dollars a week he borrowed from Charley. Willy, throughout the play, warns Biff to acquire a respectable job because Biff working as manual labor on farms and ranches in the West was not a job to be proud of according to Willy. During the play it is apparent that Willy tries to instill the same personal pride that he has in his son Biff. This is evident when Willy warns Biff not to retrieve any item that may fall from his employer’s desk because that would make him an office boy and that was beneath him. Personal pride is a double edge sword in this play. On one hand pride is what makes Willy so determined and persistent but on the other it is one reason for Willy’s destructive nature.

The need for acceptance and personal validation is another major theme in *Death of a Salesman.* Willy is a character that is constantly looking for self validation whether it is from himself, during his hallucinations, or from others. During the play Willy has a fascination if he and his sons were “well liked” by others. At one point in the play Willy blames his not being able to overcome his downfalls and shortcomings because he suspected that people did not like him. Willy even tries to find approval from the mistress he hallucinated by having her praise his sense of humor. Another example of Willy’s quest for approval is when he declares that he will become more successful in business than his neighbor Charley because he is more well liked. Willy search for self validation is a major plot developer in *Death of a Salesman* because readers get to witness the lack of personal growth Willy is burdened with.

In conclusion, *Death of a Salesman* has many major themes which include pride and the need for acceptance and personal validation. Throughout the play we witness these major themes shape Willy as a character and the decisions he makes. Willy faces an internal battle of what he wants his life to be and hallucinations are his escape to the life he actually wants. Willy has many person developmental growths throughout the play but in his dreams because reality is his downfall.